

VZCZCXRO1128
PP RUEHDBU RUEHFL RUEHLA RUEHMRE RUEHROV RUEHSR
DE RUEHKB #0066/01 0290852
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 290852Z JAN 07
FM AMEMBASSY BAKU
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 2199
INFO RUCNCIS/CIS COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUCNOSC/OSCE COLLECTIVE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 BAKU 000066

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/29/2017
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PINR](#) [PHUM](#) [KDEM](#) [SOCI](#) [AJ](#)
SUBJECT: AZERBAIJAN'S YOUTH MOVEMENTS: A BREAKDOWN OF KEY
PLAYERS

REF: A. 06 BAKU 01572
[B](#). 05 BAKU 01120

Classified By: DEPUTY CHIEF OF MISSION JASON P. HYLAND PER 1.4(B,D)

[1](#). (C) SUMMARY: Azerbaijan's youth movements are often overlooked when examining the overall political situation - both by the GOAJ and by the international community. However, youth can play a quite critical role in democratic development, and with 65 percent of the population under the age of 35, Azerbaijani youth are hardly a group to be ignored. Although there are hundreds of youth organizations in Azerbaijan, there are a handful that can be considered key players. The key players represent a range of political views: pro-government, opposition, and independent. Below, we have outlined these groups: their membership bases, their goals, and their activities. We will report the youth movements' ideas and concerns septel. END SUMMARY

RULING PARTY MOVEMENT

[2](#). (C) The Yeni Azerbaijan Party (YAP) youth movement is by far the largest youth movement in the country, with an estimated 160,000 members. However, the membership base for the YAP youth movement is quite different from other youth organizations - every member of the ruling party who happens to fall between the ages of 18 and 35 is considered a member of the youth movement. Azerbaijani law stipulates that civil servants at every level be card-carrying members of the ruling party, and with state control of so many sectors, this results in a huge number of members, including all postal workers, teachers, state oil company workers, etc. YAP youth movement President Ramin Hasanov told Poloff that between twenty and thirty percent of members are active. The YAP youth movement is also better-off financially than its counterparts from other parties. The ruling party allocates a generous amount of funding, providing for a paid staff, headquarters throughout the country, the creation and maintenance of a website, and funding for activities.

[3](#). (C) Hasanov said that the movement is active in commemorating national holidays, media outreach, developing its regional centers, expanding international contacts, and seeking government employment for its members. (NOTE: Hasanov is a GOAJ employee; he works for the State Committee on Affairs with Azerbaijanis Living in Foreign Countries.) Hasanov explained that the YAP youth movement's primary goals are to promote democratic values to young generations, and to promote ruling party principles; supporting European integration while striving to preserve national heritage. He said that many people view this activity as important only during elections, but the YAP youth movement seeks to continue the momentum of the "election culture" after elections are over. Referring to the actions of his counterparts in the opposition youth movements, Hasanov said that the YAP youth movement prefers to engage in tolerant

discussions rather than an "aggressive policy."

OPPOSITION MOVEMENTS

¶4. (C) The Popular Front Party youth movement is comprised of young members of its parent organization, the Popular Front Party (PFP), and is a member of the Youth Coalition - a mostly-opposition organization made up of eight separate youth movements and NGOs. The PFP youth movement currently has about 2,000 members, but Seymur Haziyeu - an active PFP youth movement member and one of the Youth Coalition's leaders - estimates that 500 of these are active. According to Haziyeu, the movement's members are between the ages of 18 and 30, and most are undergraduate students. The PFP youth movement's official mandate is to promote the policies of its parent organization, although through the Youth Coalition, members are more focused on social outreach and cooperation with non-partisan organizations than the PFP. Since the 2005 elections, PFP youth movement leaders have targeted greater outreach to youth in Azerbaijan's regions, but feel that the climate for youth activity has become much more difficult in the last year. Haziyeu told Poloff that the movement also has plans to create a school of leadership for young women.

¶5. (C) The Yeni Fikir youth movement is quite closely - though not officially - linked with the PFP youth movement, and is also a member of the Youth Coalition. Then-Acting Chair of Yeni Fikir Said Nuri (see bio note - paragraph 14) told Poloff that the movement's primary goal is to develop democracy and promote the protection of human rights in Azerbaijan. In the run-up to the November 2005 Parliamentary Elections, Yeni Fikir organized many protests and demonstrations. Although members are still active through the

BAKU 00000066 002 OF 004

auspices of the Youth Coalition, Yeni Fikir - which means "new thought" in Azerbaijani - lost major momentum after the arrest and conviction of three party leaders on charges of coup-plotting. (NOTE: Yeni Fikir currently lacks clear leadership and it is difficult to determine how many members remain. Many youth activists view the severity of charges brought against the Yeni Fikir leaders as a warning against political activism.)

INDEPENDENT MOVEMENTS

¶6. (C) Although there are many independent youth movements throughout the country, Dalga - which means "wave" in Azerbaijani - stands out because of its creativity. Dalga is quite small, with an estimated membership base of 130 youth, most of whom are undergraduate students. Then-Dalga President Rami Huseynli told Poloff that the organization focuses on the support and development of civil society, and encourages youth to take an active role in solving the young generation's problems. (NOTE: Huseynli recently left Dalga to head the Azerbaijan Democratic Reforms Party youth movement, but maintains a good relationship with Dalga.) According to Huseynli, Dalga's top priorities are: addressing corruption in the education system; protecting students' rights; promoting legal awareness; and expanding links throughout Azerbaijan's regions. Dalga is funded by membership dues, but because the vast majority of its members are students, the movement has scarce financial resources. Most of Dalga's efforts are accomplished through volunteer work. Huseynli said that although Dalga is an independent, politically active organization, it typically draws criticism from both the ruling party and opposition youth movements, each side accusing Dalga of being affiliated with the other.

¶7. (C) Dalga launched a campaign against corruption in education, in which the members surveyed students at several university campuses and compiled a list of the most corrupt teachers. Huseynli said that Dalga sent the list to the Ministry of National Security, and has not received a

response, but is considering publicly releasing the information. Dalga members work to develop creative methods of getting their message across, typically organizing catchy protests that attract public attention. The organization employs a legal advisor to ensure that its actions are in full compliance with Azerbaijani law. Huseynli told Poloff that Dalga members organize "flash mob" events using SMS text messages, so that police are not aware of events ahead of time. According to Huseynli, in May 2006, Dalga members staged a mock funeral near a high-traffic metro station, imitating a funeral procession with a coffin that bore a sign reading "death to corruption." Recent Dalga protests include one targeted at the expected draft law on education, during which Dalga members sang and danced in front of Parliament; as well as one in response to the GOAJ-media crackdown, in which members cleaned the facade of 33 Khagani - the building that formerly housed the opposition Popular Front Party, as well as several media outlets - prior to the November 25 eviction.

18. (C) Yox, which means "no" in Azerbaijani, has about 200 active members, most of whom are undergraduate and graduate students. Although the organization purports to be independent, Yox is a member of the mostly-opposition Youth Coalition (see paragraph 4), and Yox President Ali Ismayilov regularly participates in opposition protests. Ismayilov told Poloff that Yox primarily aims to promote peaceful civil resistance. He said that members have been extensively trained in peaceful resistance methods, and instructed to behave peacefully in all public rallies. Yox members regularly spray paint "Yox" on walls in Baku, and distribute pamphlets at universities throughout the country. The movement attempted to hold a rally in October 2006 to protest corruption and abuse of power, but the attempt was thwarted by police and Ismayilov was pre-emptively detained and questioned (see ref a). Since the foiled protest attempt, Yox members have behaved in a more low-key manner. Ismayilov said that in the coming months, the organization will focus on outreach to youth in Azerbaijan's regions.

19. (C) The Magam youth movement currently has about 100 active members, although the organization reports that there were nearly twice as many in the run-up to the November 2005 Parliamentary Elections. Although it opposes the current government, Magam - which roughly translates to "it's time" - is not linked to the traditional opposition. Magam aims to increase youth participation in the election process as well as non-violent civic struggle. The organization also works to defend students' rights, through activities like hunger strikes. Magam President Emin Huseynov, a prominent youth activist, told us that Magam's funding comes directly from

BAKU 00000066 003 OF 004

members. In a French-produced documentary on the role of youth movements in revolutions (see bio note - paragraph 13), Huseynov is shown explaining that Magam's members, who are mostly unemployed, try to give USD 10 per month, sometimes selling their personal belongings to do so. Some members, he continued, purchase electronics on store credit from local vendors, then sell them for cash in order to fund Magam.

APOLITICAL ORGANIZATIONS

110. (C) The National Assembly of Youth Organizations of the Republic of Azerbaijan (NAYORA) is the coordinating body of 68 youth organizations. NAYORA President Fuad Muradov, who, at 28 is Azerbaijan's youngest Member of Parliament (MP) (see bio note - paragraph 15), told Poloff that NAYORA's membership includes NGOs as well as organizations that span a range of political affiliations. Although Muradov said that NAYORA is apolitical, he noted that the Deputy Minister of Youth and Sports is one of the organization's chairs. According to Muradov, NAYORA is funded by international NGOs. The organization purports to be active in humanitarian, social, ecological, economical, and cultural spheres, but

NAYORA staff predominantly lobby youth interests at the state level. Muradov told Poloff that 24 members of NAYORA's organizations ran as candidates in the November 2005 Parliamentary Elections, three of whom - including Muradov - were elected. With this presence in Parliament, Muradov feels that NAYORA can influence Parliament's 42 independent MPs and nine "young" MPs in favor of youth interests.

¶11. (C) Ireli, which means "forward" in Azerbaijani, boasts "thousands" of members from all of Azerbaijan's regions. Although when asked, members obfuscate as to the source of Ireli's funding, the organization is widely speculated to be funded indirectly by the GOAJ, perhaps through the Ministry of Youth and Sports. In fact, although Ireli is advertised as an apolitical organization, the movement's leaders told Poloff that Ireli supports President Aliyev's "political direction." Ireli's main goal, according to its literature, is "modernization of the state." The organization is quite active in civic engagement, through programs like teaching basic computer skills to underprivileged youth, teaching English to orphans, and cleaning up garbage in neighborhoods. As one of Ireli's founders put it, the organization wants to "prove (to youth) that it matters to not care." Ireli leaders also plan to challenge the GOAJ to employ 1,000 youth in government jobs over the next five years.

¶12. (C) The American Alumni Association (AAA), which is supported by the Embassy, is among the most active and independent youth organizations in the country, with more than 2,000 members, who have all studied in the U.S. with support from USG programs (see ref b). AAA events range from social outings and film screenings to professional development and social awareness events. The organization frequently conducts policy studies, and has been consulted by the GOAJ on a number of issues, including the upcoming draft Law on Education. Unlike youth from other former Soviet states who have studied in the U.S. - notably Georgia and Ukraine - the majority of AAA members are not involved in politics. AAA President Fariz Ismailzade (see bio note - paragraph 16) told Poloff that AAA members, like most of Azerbaijan's youth, while politically aware, are mainly concerned with working and providing for their families.

BIO NOTES

¶13. (C) Emin Huseynov, President of the Magam youth movement as well as Founder/President of the Institute to Protect Reporter Freedom and Safety (IRFS), was featured in two widely-viewed documentaries that focused on the events surrounding Azerbaijan's November 2005 Parliamentary Elections: BBC's "How to Plan a Revolution" and French-owned ARTE's "Revolution: Mode d'Emploi." Huseynov has frequently reported being followed and harassed since the public release of the documentaries, including a September 2006 airport incident, when he was detained and questioned for hours upon return from a vacation in Turkey. Although perceived by the GOAJ to be a revolutionary, the politically savvy pro-Western Huseynov takes a more moderate approach than many of his counterparts in the traditional opposition.

¶14. (C) Said Nuri, former acting chair of the Yeni Fikir youth movement, was one of three youth arrested prior to the November 2005 Parliamentary Elections and later convicted of an attempted coup. Nuri is an ardent oppositionist, who has quite vocally and repeatedly criticized the GOAJ and sided with the traditional opposition. He suffers from thalassemia, an iron deficiency, and has been permitted to travel in order

BAKU 00000066 004 OF 004

to receive medical treatment. Nuri has been out of the country since November 2006.

¶15. (C) Fuad Muradov, the President of NAYORA and Parliament's youngest MP, was elected in November 2005, in a race that appears to have been plagued with fraud. Muradov is

rumored not to have completed the military service compulsory for all Azerbaijani men, and his wife is rumored to be have close personal relations with President Aliyev's daughters.

¶16. (C) Fariz Ismailzade, the President of AAA, is quite ambitious and a talented networker - a skill that many of the politically-affiliated youth leaders lack. Ismailzade worked for the International Republican Institute (IRI) for four and a half years, and recently left to take a position at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' newly-created Diplomatic Academy. While Ismailzade is widely thought to be government-leaning, we consider him to be objective. Ismailzade is a frequent contributor to several international publications, writing both under his own name and under pen names. He is married to the niece of Central Election Commission Chair Mazahir Panahov.
DERSE